

## 7 Rescaling security strategies

### State tactics and citizen responses to violence in Mexico City

*Diane E. Davis and Guillermo Ruiz de Teresa*

#### **Introduction: The spatial dynamics of policing and security**

Many cities of the developing world are facing growing urban violence and insecurity (Moser 2004; Rotker 2002). These developments are evident in rising rates of homicide, robbery, assault, and kidnapping, as well as contraband-related violence (often involving drugs or guns). In the most violence-prone cities, police corruption and impunity have contributed to public insecurity, helping produce outposts of urban violence in which organized gangs involved in illegal activities, ranging from drugs and guns to knock-off designer products, are as powerful as – or in competition with – police and military. These conditions are pervasive across Latin America and the Caribbean, where organized gangs equipped with arms and advanced technologies for protection and detection against law enforcement raids have blatantly attacked police, military, and citizens who report gangs to authorities. Many organized crime groups have become the functional equivalent of mini-states by monopolizing the means of violence and providing protection and territorial governance in exchange for citizen allegiance, whether coerced or freely given (Davis 2010). Their capacities derive partly from the state's longstanding absence from these geographical areas, with years of infrastructural and policy neglect having reinforced poverty in ways that have made local residents open to the protection offered by gang leaders (Arias 2006).

Just as significantly, these dynamics can weaken national states and empower criminal forces whose blatant disregard for rule of law, democratic governance, and human rights can further destabilize cities, thus driving the vicious cycle. Both local and national authorities are facing governance challenges because the acceleration of violence and crime has in certain cases pushed citizens to take justice and governance measures into their own hands through vigilantism. Even in those countries where citizens are not yet resorting to such measures, governments are finding their legitimacy eroding. Larger numbers of armed actors in the most “fragile cities” of the global south marshal weapons and other coercive means that can parallel, if not exceed or undermine, those of the nation-state (Muggah and Savage 2012). This further reduces state legitimacy, for two reasons. First, citizens give up hope that governments can stem the tide

of disorder. Second, such developments motivate states to use militarized tactics to combat civilian armed actors – ranging from the deployment of the military to more routine forms of police-deployed violence – that can further alienate the affected communities from the state (Graham 2010).

Complicating this situation is that in these cities violence often stems from illegal or illicit trading in drugs, guns, and other contraband that involves large capital transactions. This has made it relatively easy for violence entrepreneurs and other non-state armed actors to bribe the state's own coercive agents, thereby reinforcing networks of impunity and a lack of accountability that further test the state's legitimacy and its coercive capacity to restore order. For these reasons many urban residents have held little trust in the state, particularly police and the justice system. In response, disenfranchised citizens may feel compelled to take matters into their own hands – either through vigilante acts or, more commonly, by hiring private security guards who act on behalf of individuals and communities but not the larger public, or even at times by siding with the local organized criminals in return for protection. Either way, state capacity and legitimacy decline even as individual and more privatized forms of protection or coercion become the norm, a situation that serves as a breeding ground for ongoing violence.

That organized crime or illicit activities are embedded in everyday urbanism in Latin America has made crime-fighting and reduction of violence major challenges for state authorities. This is because narco-trafficking is usually situated in transnational networks, but relies on nodes and strategic spatial locations in the city to flourish. Its dual character – operating both locally and transnationally – means that both police and military must coordinate their efforts, an organizational challenge for most states. Further limiting crime-fighting capacity is the fact that actors involved in smuggling direct their efforts towards keeping the state out of those key “hot spots” within the city where illicit activities tend to flower. To do so, organized criminal groups use violence to monitor or restrain the state's entry to – and citizens' movement in – those urban spaces where control of markets is key to economic success. Criminals thus invest social, political, and economic resources into efforts to spatially dominate the neighborhoods, streets, or corridors of urban space where their activities unfold.

It is the will and capacity to control space locally while operating transnationally that gives organized criminal cartels, mafia, smugglers, or other pirating forces their greatest coercive and accumulative power (Davis 2009). Yet these same dynamics make policing difficult, especially if it is not well-coordinated across multiple scales of crime-fighting. The extent to which states are effective in policing criminal activities at all territorial or spatial scales will thus determine both the local and national security situation.

In this chapter, we critically examine the spatial dynamics of security policy in an environment of chronic, drug-related violence, considering the implications for state authority and urban life. We start from the premise that the state's capacity to police urban space – and criminal activities within it – is the key to security, particularly in the struggle against organized crime. We frame our understanding of security in debates about the rescaling of state power (Brenner 2004), but contribute

to this literature by asking under what conditions the rescaling of state power takes the form of alternative spatial strategies of policing devolved down from the nation to the city, to the neighborhood, and even the street. Using a quasi-ethnographic account of social, spatial, and institutional conditions in Mexico City and its most violent neighborhoods, and later contrasting this experience to that of urban policing strategies in Rio de Janeiro, we ask what social or spatial conditions enable or constrain local authorities' capacities to offer security at the neighborhood scale. The approach we use combines methods and insights from various disciplinary vantage points, including those concerned with urban governance, cultural history (in terms of community), geography (in terms of spatiality), sociology (in terms of resistance), and the law. We not only show that security must be understood as a negotiated process involving citizens and the state in a delimited territorial space. We also demonstrate that the state's power to securitize key locations in the city is iteratively constructed through contestation within and among citizens, criminals, and local authorities, with these interactions mediated by urban cultural history, concepts of community, and the law. The chapter concludes with an assessment of whether the decision to pursue a more spatially targeted strategy of security has brought success, not merely in crime-fighting but also in affirming state power and legitimacy.

Our aim is to further illuminate twenty-first-century transformations in policing and security practices, at least in countries struggling with chronic drug-related violence. Historically, scholars have identified the state's efforts to impose social order and create mechanisms for internalizing such goals among individual citizens as most successful when individuals accept the legitimacy of national authority. In a departure from this presupposition, our research suggests that the local scale remains the most important terrain for reinforcing security and grounding state legitimacy, at least in situations of chronic violence. We argue that the state's imposition of spatial control and social order in delimited urban spaces provides the basis for a new social contract between citizens and the state built around spatial control of targeted spaces as much as through policing. Such strategies not only help legitimize locally negotiated state authority at the expense of national state authority in ways that challenge traditional scales of sovereignty; they also give the state options for providing security through control of urban properties in ways that directly bypass the police as the key agents of the state and its security apparatus. Thus security is transformed from a social and political project in which police are the key coercive force, to a spatial project in which the police are much less relevant and where citizens and local authorities directly negotiate modes of security through contention over given urban territories and neighborhood sites.

### **Drug violence in Mexico: A problem for the local or national state?**

In Mexico, accelerating urban violence has continued for more than a decade, owing to the dramatic expansion of the drug trade and its empowerment of

organized criminal cartels and narco-traffickers (United Nations 2008). In 2006, Mexico's President Felipe Calderon launched a full-fledged war against the narcos, strategically deploying military troops throughout the country. Many of these efforts were focused on the US–Mexico border, a key territory in the illicit drug trade. This strategy itself was part of a larger military initiative to control entry into and exit from the country as a plan to secure the entire national space. The Calderon government chose this strategy because it recognizes that cartels control market routes, and has been fighting to claim “ownership” of them given that profit margins owe to the capacity to control entry points into the USA.

Calderon's efforts have had minimal gains from the vantage point of cities. As Calderon's six-year term comes to an end, Mexico still hosts 13 out of the 50 most violent cities in the world, with its most violent, Ciudad Juarez, reporting 229 murders per 100,000 inhabitants (Consejo Ciudadano 2010). With drug cartels violently fighting back against Calderon's militarized strategy, bringing civilians into the range of battle, there has been little room for negotiations within and between cartels and the state, allowing the drug trade to continue. At the same time, changes in the nature and access to the US market have shifted the spatial dynamics of the drug trade. With military activity at the border, smugglers have turned their sights to local markets, seizing new territories and seeking to establish control over urban spaces linked to Mexican consumer markets. The battle over turf in Mexico's cities is part of what drives up rates of urban violence, evidenced by intra and inter-cartel battle in cities – like Monterrey – where armed gangs have occupied freeways and closed down points leading in and out of the city (Milenio 2012).

For drug smugglers the challenge is no longer just how to transport drugs more efficiently, but how to establish boundaries of consumer markets in contested urban environments. Some of this is a byproduct of shifting market activities unrelated to the problems with border crossing. Social trends and shifts in the economy over the last decade created more demand for synthetic drugs within the US market. Subject to slow business cycles, cocaine that flowed through Mexico towards the north became trapped in a depreciated economy and sellers were forced to find new consumers. These changes in consumer preferences shifted the spatial terrain of drug operation: from transport infrastructure, ports and border crossings, to any urban environment where new markets could be found or formed. This process proves to be symptomatic of a country that morphs from being mostly a transit territory into a consumer market. In addition, the government was not prepared for an increase in drug addiction or youth gang-related activities. Having undertaken a national war against organized crime, the state was caught unaware as *narcomenudeo* – small scale, street-level drug trafficking – surged.

By 2010, street-level drug retailing had positioned itself as one of the most profitable illegal businesses in Mexico. This small-scale sector showed profits of more than one billion dollars, and was responsible for national consumption rates totaling close to 500 tons of drugs per year.<sup>1</sup> Figures confirm that in the last decade, problems of drug-related violence in Mexico have trickled down from the national to the urban scale in the form of *narcomenudeo*, in ways that have

transformed the urban landscape (Proceso 2010). The relationship between drugs and their consumers, as in any retail trade, is about location and accessibility. This also explains why former “middlemen” for the traffickers are now members of cartels, capable of bringing significant profits by conquering neighborhood territories through extortion, threat, or actual control of real estate. Whether by claiming public hubs of consumption, such as bars, occupation of actual storefronts, or by engaging informal vendors in their service, large swathes of urban territories are becoming identified as outside state control and in the hands of drug traffickers. In cities where this reality is contested by either urban residents or the state, the edges of these so-called “no man’s lands” are generating high degrees of violence and insecurity.

### ***Narcomenudeo* in Mexico City: Can the local state make a difference?**

Given the evidence of increasing violence linked to *narcomenudeo* in Mexico’s cities (Molzahn *et al.* 2012), it is surprising that the country’s largest and most economically vibrant city stands as an exception. Mexico City is no longer one of the top fifty most dangerous Mexican cities, despite the fact that much of the original violence in the 1990s concentrated there (Davis 2006; 2007). Since Calderon initiated his national anti-crime and security strategy, Mexico City has slowly shed its image as intensely violent and is now considered relatively safe, a substantial achievement given its history and size. Some now characterize Mexico City as a relatively secure “island in the middle of a climate of violence that pervades large part of the country,” not just because of declining crime rates but also owing to the relative absence of cartel visibility (Olmos 2011).

Such developments are surprising when one looks carefully at the nature, extent, and spatial patterns of *narcomenudeo* in Mexico City, where “micro” drug trade had grown 450 percent in the last nine years. That this rate matches the national average suggests a persistence of drug activities in the capital. Mexico City is considered the fifth most important urban market in the country for *narcomenudeo*, hosting more than 40,000 drug selling points and involving the networked collaboration of more than 200,000 people under the organization of around 40 gangs (Milenio 2010). Most of the drug transactions in Mexico City take place in the districts of Iztapalapa and Cuauhtémoc, in the heart of the city, as well as the neighboring Gustavo A. Madero. Cuauhtémoc concentrates the highest density of *narcotienditas* and reports the largest number of crimes related to drugs in the city (Medellín 2007). Within Cuauhtémoc, there is one neighborhood called Tepito that is the most significant distribution center for *narcomenudeo* in the city.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence suggests that the state’s spatially targeted strategies for monitoring and/or protecting urban space help explain the city’s successes in territorially pushing back against drug-related violence. For one, recent studies show that large-scale drug trading en route to the USA now avoids territories within Mexico City, with most activities that originally passed through Iztapalapa and

Tepito now finding their way into the municipality of Ecatepec in the neighboring State of Mexico (Olmos 2011). For another, local authorities in Mexico City now use a new spatially focused security strategy aimed at street-level drug trading, in which urban-planning authorities as well as police are working together to monitor and transform micro-land uses in those city neighborhoods where drug-trafficking persists.

The local government's capacities in these regards have been partly enabled by recent legislation allowing city authorities to target particular neighborhoods like Tepito for these new policing operations. In prior years, local governments were not allowed to directly intervene in the investigation, pursuit, or prosecution of drug trafficking because it was considered a "national" crime, falling under the administrative domain of the federal executive. Yet in a challenge to this division of powers and under pressure from local mayors, municipalities, and opposition party leaders, when Calderon launched the "war on drugs" in 2006, he faced pressures from local municipalities to complement this strategy with a reform of the health law that would differentiate large-scale drug-trading from street-level drug trafficking. With this new law, local authorities were afforded an opportunity to craft their own security strategies for fighting drug-related criminal activities, because the change in legislation allows for a conceptualization of *narcomenudeo* as a local activity that unfolds in city spaces. This made it possible for local authorities to police particular areas of the city through novel more territorially targeted strategies that differed from those undertaken by federal police in their national crime-fighting efforts.

Yet even with this legislation, most other cities in Mexico did not take advantage of it to introduce alternative more localized strategies, thus further raising questions about how and why Mexico City did. We can find answers through examination of the controversy over La Fortaleza, a 5,800-square-meter housing estate in the center of one of Mexico City's oldest hubs of crime, the neighborhood of Tepito. The property, known as "The Fortress," was among the largest centers of counterfeit goods and piracy, and the site for commercialization of more than 10 percent of the *narcomenudeo* in Mexico City (Mora 2007). The residents of the property and its surrounding neighborhood had long fought against state efforts to intervene in their community, despite the presence of illicit trading. But in 2007, Mexico City's mayor expropriated the property, using a legal tool justified by the spirit of the new health legislation as the basis for securitizing the city, with aim being to remove *narcomenudeo*. An examination of Tepito and how citizens and the state both struggled to regulate and control urban space both before and after the expropriation will help illuminate the features of the state's rescaling of security strategies on violence and the legitimacy of governing arrangements in Mexico City, then and now.

### **Tepito: State security strategies before 2006**

Although the new health legislation promised to give Mexico City authorities a new mandate for asserting control over urban space in the name of curtailing

retail drug trading, the advent of this legislation was by no means the first time authorities sought to intervene at a neighborhood scale to securitize Mexico City. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Mexico City government tried to use a combination of policing and programmatic changes in urban land-use changes with the aim of redeveloping central city areas – to mitigate the social, spatial, and economic conditions associated with informality and disorder (Davis 1994) and later crime (Davis 2007). This was especially so with respect to Tepito, long identified as a problematic urban area (Eckstein 1977). Tepito's reputation as a marketplace for the underprivileged, and home to the city's illicit economy traces to the pre-colonial times, when it formed part of the Aztec Tlatelolco market. As early as 1901, Tepito's history as a site of illicit trade created a special form of social cohesion and neighborhood solidarity. The social and cultural identity of *Tepiteños* was built around suspicion of local authorities, a strong historical relationship to the streets and other neighborhood attributes in need of defense from the state, and the neighborhood's market identity (Castro Nieto 1990).

Until the city's main boulevard (Avenida Reforma) cut through Tepito in the first years of the twentieth century, the neighborhood's urban terrain had never been spatially altered by outside forces. Even after that, infrastructure projects that altered the built environment of the neighborhood were few. In the 1970s, the construction of two four-lane thoroughfares (Eje 1 and Eje 2) provoked the first major displacement of Tepito's residents, signaling a major confrontation between *Tepiteños* as an organized entity and what they saw as an overpowering state trying to destroy their neighborhood. Residents were relatively successful in rejecting most of the rest of the urban restructuring elements in the "Plan Tepito."

Their social and political strength in these regards was built on economic foundations. In the 1970s national restrictions on consumer imports created opportunities for local residents to strengthen illegal trade networks by selling contraband foreign merchandise in the informal and illicit markets in Tepito. The astonishing growth of illegally imported merchandise, known in Mexico as *fayuca*,<sup>3</sup> had two effects. First, it changed policing in the area, because the huge sums of illicit money passing through the neighborhood created relations of complicity between corrupt police and local traders, enabling the illicit economy to thrive while also limiting the state's capacity to use police effectively for securitizing the neighborhood. Second, these dynamics strengthened the autonomy of Tepito as a socially cohesive neighborhood, thus buttressing residents' efforts to keep local authorities and their interventions at arm's length. Soon Tepito became the hub of the *fayuca*, serving not merely as a neighborhood-wide informal retailer, but also as a city-wide and national distributor of contraband consumer durables.

The strength of the informal economy provided a barrier to the government's will and capacity to physically enter into the urban territory of Tepito and its centuries old multi-family housing units known as *vecindades*. The street market for *fayuca* and myriad other forms of informal vending expanded

and overtook the whole neighborhood. What has been since called the *barrio bravo* (or brave community) became known for its collective form of defense and protection. Here the deteriorating urban infrastructure and strong social networks enacted a flexible yet impermeable membrane that protected illegal activities, rendering the territory semi-independent from city regulators (Castro Nieto 1990).

Things began to change in 1985 when an earthquake wrought major destruction in Tepito, producing widespread damage to the housing stock and bringing many commercial activities to a halt as the neighborhood sought to recover. This situation created the opportunity for government representatives and other state actors to enter Tepito's "forbidden territory," using the post-disaster recovery as an opportunity to reorganize the neighborhood. Now, the logic for entry was not policing so much as urban redevelopment, a framing that gave the government a non-security rationale for its intervention. A redevelopment plan for housing was created, largely financed by the World Bank. With it came external experts, and the "normalization" of the poorest and most heavily destroyed neighborhoods in Tepito and other downtown areas was prioritized (Connolly 1987).

Local authorities in charge of reconstruction initially sought to accelerate the decentralization of those neighborhoods by sending all social housing to the periphery, and redeveloping central city plots for more upscale uses.<sup>4</sup> In response, Tepito residents protested at the site of federal and local government offices located near Tepito (Gamboa de Buen and Revah 1990). However, the earthquake also brought private-property owners who pressured local and national authorities to regularize land, displace tenants, and redevelop the area – a strategy of renovation that threatened to destroy the existent social fabric and cultural life of Tepito residents (Duhau 1987). Protest from both sides stopped when the state enacted an Expropriation Decree laying the groundwork for a new housing program offering land title and property rights to inhabitants with long-standing residence in Tepito prior to the earthquake. The expropriation decree was the first of its kind in the city. By invoking six different laws, it created a powerful spatial tool that would be invoked again almost 20 years later during the expropriation of La Fortaleza. But this was not the only connection to the past.

Tepito was the neighborhood most dramatically altered by the new reconstruction program for the city, with more than double the housing units initially proposed being built, thus producing higher urban densities (Connolly 1987). Furthermore, two of the developments were the massive housing units later called La Casa Blanca and La Fortaleza.<sup>5</sup> These were generic three-story housing blocks of conventional architecture that "fractured" the traditional urban landscape (Connolly 1987). Many of the subsequent increases in insecurity, criminality, and social problems in Tepito can be traced to the altered built environment (Tomas 1994). Tellingly, the building site selected to celebrate the iconic modern architecture of the rebuilt downtown area, displayed on the cover of a publication describing the post-earthquake modernizing project of reconstruction, was 40 Tenochtitlan Street: the building now known as La Fortaleza.



### Expropriation for other means: Securitizing Tepito, post-2006

The transformation of Tepito into a landscape of intense criminality owed to more than transformations in the built environment after the earthquake. Changes in local employment and commercial activities fueled by the liberalization of the Mexican economy also damaged the neighborhood's social fabric, leading to greater state pressures for intervention.

The approval of the North American Foreign Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 following post-earthquake housing reconstruction accelerated liberalization of the national economy, making its mark on violence in the city (Davis 2006; Davis and Alvarado 1999). These changes directly affected Tepito because with tariffs on imported goods minimized or removed, the *fayuca* market virtually disappeared, pushing many informal vendors into other black markets. More clandestine and dangerous forms of piracy and the smuggling of counterfeit goods soon grew, with *narcomenudeo* creeping into back-offices and warehouses as a key source of trade. As residents became fearful of dangerous criminal activities and work opportunities declined (with high crime rates, fewer wanted to shop in Tepito), the stable resident population dropped from 120,000 in the mid-eighties to nearly 50,000 today. With these changes, and the loss of residents willing to monitor and protect the community on their own, Tepito became one of the few territories in the city under the total control of violent actors (Pansters and Castillo Berthier 2007).

Faced with a deteriorating community situation and violence in Tepito spilling over into the upscale redevelopment of other downtown areas, local authorities became desperate to secure the area. In 2006, a public debate surfaced over who should have the power to fight crime and impose security measures in the city. A key protagonist in this discussion was newly elected Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard (2006-12). He supported a restructuring of police and a new special force whose mandate would be limited to the city's historic center, as well as technology like surveillance cameras to replace corrupt police (see also Botello, this volume). Ebrard advocated approaching retail drug trafficking as a territorial issue, a position influenced by recommendations against violence presented by Giuliani Partners in 2003, when Ebrard was the city's principal police chief (Davis 2007).

After election in 2006, Ebrard's team wanted to hit the ground running, but first needed reliable diagnostics. Because *narcomenudeo* was considered stable and site-specific, Ebrard argued mapping these conditions was crucial. Trustworthy information was needed about where drugs were being sold, leading Ebrard to create a Citizens Observatory, built around cooperative action with residents to obtain information. The Citizen Observatory was the first of two "spatial strategies" the local government developed to securitize the city. It relied on strong relationships with civil society for success. To organize surveillance and data collection, the city was divided into 918 quadrants, with each quadrant headed by a Chief who would communicate with citizens to locate drug retailers, thieves, and other criminal actors. Citizens became proactive in

reclaiming their neighborhoods, with reported program participation of 1,300,000 households and more than 30 percent of emergency calls related to drug retailing activities (Asamblea Legislativa 2011). As early as 2007, the security information from this program was translated into an Atlas of Crime that identified drug sale and distribution points in the city totaling 5,174 sites.<sup>6</sup>

Yet information alone was not enough to eliminate the networks of drug-trafficking. This is why Ebrard devised a complementary territorial strategy, inspired by the 2006 health reform which was still facing opposition in congress from those who wanted the war against drugs to remain in the hands of federal authorities working on a national scale under a larger territorial mandate. In pushing for more local power to introduce security measures that scaled down to the neighborhood, Ebrard did not merely turn to the local police, many of whom were highly corrupt and implicated in drug trafficking or contraband in Tepito and elsewhere. Instead, he argued that the best way to eliminate *narcomenudeo* was to isolate and attack so-called territorial hot spots and thus weaken the market logic of the drug trafficking network.

In June of 2007, while still waiting formal congressional approval of the health reform, Mayor Ebrard used the expropriation decree first adopted in the 1985 reconstruction program as the basis for decisive action.<sup>7</sup> The first property to be seized and repurposed was symbolic, and this is where La Fortaleza re-enters the picture. By 2007 it was among the most significant hubs of *narcomenudeo*, a single property responsible for almost 10 percent of street-level retail drug trade in Mexico City and serving as a distribution and strategic site, not merely a retail spot.

When the raid to expropriate the property in 2007 took place, police stated that at least 60 apartments had been used for illegal video production and retail drug trafficking. Such activities had been made possible by the fact that La Fortaleza was an inward-looking complex of fourteen three-story buildings surrounding one large patio, with four apartments per floor for a total of 155 apartments. That it had only four points of pedestrian entry reinforced its reputation as a walled “fortress.” Although much documentation of what happened during the raid was concealed by the Secretaría de Seguridad Pública, some was later released to justify the “assertive” nature of the strike by describing the infrastructural ecosystem that had been created within what seemed like an impenetrable structure. Police chronicles showed apartments with double bulletproof doors, multiple high-security locks and electronic alarm systems, secondary entries through the ceiling, *ad hoc* security rooms on the roofs, and false walls that revealed hidden rooms and tunnels hidden behind furniture and mirrors (Proceso 2007). The raid also revealed a major clandestine tunnel, the first of an alleged network of 26 in Tepito, further proving that La Fortaleza and its surrounding neighborhood was indeed an urban trafficking network hub.

During the raid the complex was mostly empty, and information about how much property was seized or numbers of inhabitants displaced was never publicly announced. Even so, some residents were offered a monthly stipend of \$200 while they were relocated, and others were given the possibility of indemnification

(\$25,000 per household) if they had no criminal record and could prove property rights.<sup>8</sup> Both initiatives were intended to establish the state's authority to monitor which populations lived where, while also offering itself as legitimate guarantor of residents' social welfare. The expropriation was also followed by a public presentation of the administration's new plans to redevelop La Fortaleza and all subsequent seized properties as community development centers.

There was little immediate, negative citizen reaction. But soon questions began to emerge from the media and political partisans, who questioned Ebrard's intentions, given Tepito's symbolism and its proximity to tourist zones under development. Some suggested the targeted expropriation was merely a real-estate development project masquerading as a security strategy. An equally controversial set of questions were posed about the authenticity and efficacy of the operation.

Whatever the motivation, the message about the state's new spatial strategies of crime-fighting was clear. Other inhabitants of emblematic yet problematic housing estates from the 1985 redevelopment era, like Casa Blanca, quickly went into prevention mode. They spoke to the media and hung large messages on their facades inviting the police to enter to inspect their contents, just to prove Casa Blanca was "a legitimate and clean community" and not meriting expropriation or destruction (Terra 2007). Owing to citizen outcry, from at least 55 properties planned for expropriation as of 2007, only six were set in motion for recovery; and almost five years later, only La Fortaleza has been razed, in part because the other properties slated for expropriation have been caught up in the judicial system.

### Limits to the effective rescaling of state security strategies

After all the controversy, and four years and 10 million (US) dollars later, a new recreational facility and community center of 7,650 square meters opened to the public on the grounds of the former Fortaleza. This was the largest investment ever in Tepito. More than 225 minors will receive special care, as well as psychological and juridical counseling for families, rehabilitation services and recreational activities. In these regards, La Fortaleza was the first, most symbolic, and arguably most successful of the Ebrard's administration's efforts to expropriate land around the city for crime-fighting purposes. It showed how a land-use policy instrument, conceived as a spatially targeted security strategy focused on a key urban site, could be used to disrupt a regional network of drug distribution.

But the costs turned out to be much larger than the city administration had anticipated, leading to a rethinking of approach. What started as a 12-month project turned into four years of uncertainty, with problems encountered in the post-expropriation period practically insuring that this would be the only successful component of a more scaled-out plan to fight *narcomenudeo* and *narcomenudeo*-related violence in Mexico City. Legally speaking, expropriation came to be understood as an expensive and drawn out procedure easily blocked by citizen activists who sought to defend their homes and street turf. It was also a strategy readily slowed down in the halls of justice; even when

successful, expropriation required compensation for the affected, which also created incentives for negotiating both before and during the court process.

Most important, perhaps, expropriation was understood as a highly politicized act that brought claims of undue state power in ways that echoed pre-2006 attempts at intervention. The contestation and protest, judicial slow-down, and charges of authoritarian excess this strategy presupposed created a media frenzy and widespread criticism that made it difficult to successfully implement on the larger spatial scale intended by the local authorities. For these reasons, it was not replicated in other locations,<sup>9</sup> and its impact at the La Fortaleza site was limited in terms of its larger overall effect on the neighborhood. Some of this owed to the fact that residents were so well-connected to each other that this single targeted strike only served to mobilize surrounding neighbors in solidarity against further action. This suggests that despite the clear strategic importance of the site within the local drug-trafficking network, and despite the security and crime-fighting logic of targeting this particular building, expropriation failed to fundamentally transform the neighborhood and the types of activities that predominated there, instead mobilizing citizens in reaction against the state's use of this particular strategy.

Faced with limited prospects for using expropriation to sequester other properties, the Ebrard administration began looking for new forms of spatial intervention. They did not turn to the new policing capacities guaranteed by the 2006 health law, which Ebrard and others had pushed for and which had finally been approved, because other problems with this legislation began to materialize. Part of the concern was budgetary, which explains why this long-struggled-over law has been implemented in only a few states. Giving judicial authority to local administrators to intervene in *narcomenudeo* may be one thing; but finding local resources to pay for these expanded policing activities is another, particularly in locations where the local police may have long-standing relations of corruption that limit their crime-fighting capacity even in the best of circumstances. Although in Mexico City there are more resources than in many other cities in the country, the option of relying on local police for new forms of fighting local drug-trafficking was not ideal, given the history of police corruption, and this was a constraint. It was an especially critical one given the fact that the new health legislation left room for considerable police discretion about what constituted *narcomenudeo*, thus offering new opportunities for arbitrary arrest. This, in turn, could invite negative citizen reaction and the likelihood of protest if the definitional basis for new security measures were to remain in the hands of the police themselves.

These issues were of great concern to Ebrard in the context of longstanding Mexico City police corruption, where trust in police was already low. In an effort to avoid another round of citizen antagonism to his efforts to securitize space, Ebrard thus turned to another legal tool to control property: the so-called law of "dominion extinction," loosely translated as seizure of assets (Asamblea Legislativa 2008; Constitución Política 2009). This spatially targeted strategy could be tailored toward seizing and repurposing assets used in *narcomenudeo* while avoiding the problems associated with direct expropriation of an entire property itself. The use

of a similar law for drug-related crime-fighting was first championed in violence-ridden Colombia in 1996 (Gonzalez 2012), and later adopted in Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, and Chile. Mexico City followed suit in 2008, soon after recognizing problems with the La Fortaleza expropriation.

This new tool gave the local government a legal basis to “depose a person or family from their property when they are considered guilty of a crime” without going through a formal process of expropriation that could end up displacing or disadvantaging numerous residents and their site-based livelihoods.<sup>10</sup> Yet unlike changes introduced by the new health law, when seizing assets the government was not required to prove criminal intent or responsibility of individuals, but only to demonstrate a crime had occurred (i.e. a drug was sold). It provided the city government the right to seize any property used for *narcomenudeo* – from production labs to warehouses and shops – without necessarily justifying or defending this categorization in a court of law either *a priori* or *ex post facto*.

Unlike expropriation, this tool also offered a less politically charged and more bureaucratically streamlined basis intervening in the name of crime-fighting. It neither required compensation for a property nor for the state to prove a given individual committed a crime, only that they were involved at a given location. This also meant the local government could spend less money and time justifying the original seizure, even as it limited citizens’ bases for protesting against the government actions. This is not to say that it is a perfect strategy. Questions have been raised by human rights organizations about the legitimate basis for identifying citizens as being involved in criminal activities without actually proving their guilt in court. Yet the law has already been implemented with limited levels of success in a variety of domains, thus giving it some possibility of future success. Of the 113 cases initiated by the city government between March 2009 and February 2012, only three targeted organized crime; and the strategy was seen as so promising that the Federal Congress passed a similar law in 2009 allowing seizure of assets and property related to four types of crime: car theft, human trafficking, kidnapping, and organized crime.

Mexico City is the only city in the country to have adopted this law against *narcomenudeo*-related crimes, perhaps because of prior successes and commitments to using spatially targeted strategies as a mechanism for securitizing its most dangerous neighborhoods. Toward such ends, in 2011 Mayor Ebrard institutionalized this new security strategy by establishing a new security unit to help target properties and identify activities throughout the city that could potentially be the site of “dominion extinction” actions. Among the many gains resulting from this and prior spatial strategies is the city’s newfound status as a relatively safe haven, dropped from the list of the most dangerous places in Mexico.

## Conclusion

This chapter suggests spatial strategies deployed by authorities in Mexico City in recent years have produced a range of results regarding crime-fighting, security, and citizen response. In the most vulnerable and violent neighborhoods like

Tepito, where criminal activities are deeply integrated into urban life, policing interventions in prior years were limited by social conditions and community resistance, along with police corruption that limited the viability of traditional security strategies. In contrast, newer strategies that emphasized targeted spatial interventions and tied them to legal mandates for expropriating or seizing urban property seem to have had more traction. This owes partly to the fact that crime problems – and the need to turn to heavy-handed legal measures that include expropriation of property – derived from prior housing interventions that changed the character of neighborhood land use.

The chapter also underscored the limits to spatial strategies. When heavy-handed means are used to “enter” into community-run urban spaces, as with the expropriation of La Fortaleza, they generate citizen dissatisfaction and thus are not easily replicated elsewhere in the city. This suggests that room for local state maneuver when using spatial strategies of security – rather than traditional policing models – is also highly circumscribed. While greater criminality may inspire more concerted efforts for strategic spatial interventions and a degree of citizen tolerance, larger community opposition can set limits on state spatial actions and their crime-fighting efficacy. As such, there is often only a tiny window of opportunity for developing viable security strategies in well-organized communities facing violence, spatially targeted or otherwise. With this narrow room for maneuver, strategies that target well-defined sites and properties and that also shun full expropriation have been the most successful, from both the community and security point of view. Such strategies give the state a territorial foothold to remove certain criminal elements without disrupting the entire social fabric of a neighborhood.

What may be most valuable about targeted spatial strategies, however, are not merely their benefits in terms of urban and community improvement, but also their capacity to reduce reliance on police as the main source of urban security. When compared with cities like Rio de Janeiro where crime-fighting in the name of security has been heavily militarized and reliant on police occupation, Mexico City’s use of targeted spatial strategies to securitize a location by restoring and reviving key neighborhood sites for the larger community good is relatively laudable. This is the aim that underlies, for example, the expropriation of La Fortaleza and subsequent efforts to turn this contested site into a community development center, as well as the seizure of assets approach. Such strategies departed from the coercion-heavy imposition of police whose aim has been to militarily control entire neighborhoods, as seen in Rio de Janeiro.

While supporters of the Rio program may also argue that their aim is community improvement, use of a militarized strategy of forced displacement of criminal elements and subsequent police occupation to re-establish state control over urban space suggests Rio’s is a coercive policing approach, in which violence, abuses of state power, and human-rights violations are more likely (Velooso 2010). Granted, there have been claims of human rights violations in the spatially targeted programs of Mexico, too. When entire neighborhoods remain vulnerable to networks of illicit activities, as in both Mexico and Rio, site-specific, targeted

strategies can also be contested. Even so, the case of Mexico City suggests there are benefits to pursuing the slow but steady spatial expansion of securitizing urban territory, property by property, because the nature and form of coercion used is much less discretionary and more circumscribed. These strategies hold more potential to enhance overall community buy-in. By combining security and community development aims, and insuring that responsibility for security remains a shared objective, targeted spatial strategies can unite citizens and the state around common goals of urban renovation rather than contributing to resident estrangement.

## Notes

- 1 Statement by Monte Alejandro Rubido García, *Subsecretario de Prevención, Vinculación y Derechos Humanos de la Secretaría de Seguridad Pública*, as reported by *Proceso* (2010).
- 2 Drugs are not produced in DF. Cocaine comes from Colombia and arrives through the airport or by boat, from the coast of Michoacan. Marijuana comes from diverse sources from all around the Sierra Madre and is housed in warehouses in Centro, most of them within Tepito (Fernandez and Salazar 2008: 68-69).
- 3 “*Fayuca*: The word meant contraband, illegally imported merchandise: stereos, televisions, calculators, cameras, silk shirts, tennis shoes, blue jeans, blenders, and blouses” (Quinones 2001: 239).
- 4 Decades of rent control had limited incentives for owners to upgrade rental properties.
- 5 A total of 13 such buildings were constructed throughout the poorest city neighborhoods. See *Renovación Habitacional Popular* (1987).
- 6 According to published information by SSP by 2009 the total number of sites reached 40,000. See <http://www.ssp.df.gob.mx/>.
- 7 On March 21, 2007 Ebrard expropriated Tenochtitlán 40 y Jesús Carranza 33, both in Tepito.
- 8 Only between 40 and 50 percent of residents had property rights.
- 9 La Ford, in Iztapalapa, was also expropriated a few months later, but as a strategic operation attributed to car-theft networks rather than *narcomenudeo*.
- 10 For text of the law see *Constitución Política* (2009: Art. 22).

## References

- Arias, D. (2006) *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Asamblea Legislativa (2008) *Iniciativa de Ley de Extinción de Dominio para el Distrito Federal*, Mexico City: Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 17 September.
- Asamblea Legislativa (2011) *Promete Mondragón Atlas de Incidencia Delictiva*, Mexico City: Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 29 Sep.
- Brenner, N. (2004) *New State Spaces*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castro Nieto, G.G. (1990) “Intermediarismo político y sector informal: el comercio ambulante en Tepito.” *Nueva Antropología*, 9(37): 59–69.
- Connolly, P. (1987) “La política habitacional después de los sismos.” *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, 2(1): 101-120.
- Consejo Ciudadano (2010) *Estudio comparativo de la incidencia de homicidio doloso en ciudades y jurisdicciones sub-nacionales de los países del mundo*, Mexico City: Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal.

- Constitución Política (2009) *Ley Federal de Extinción de Dominio*, Mexico City: Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos.
- Davis, D.E. (1994) *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Davis, D.E. (2006) "Undermining the Rule of Law: Democratization and the Dark Side of Police Reform in Mexico." *Latin American Politics and Society*, 48(1): 55–86.
- Davis, D.E. (2007) "El Factor Giuliani: delincuencia, la "cero tolerancia" en el trabajo policiaco y la transformación de la esfera pública en el centro de la ciudad de México." *Estudios Sociológicos*, 25(75): 639–83.
- Davis, D.E. (2009) "Non-State Armed Actors, New Imagined Communities, and Shifting Patterns of Sovereignty and Insecurity in the Modern World." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 30(2): 221–45.
- Davis, D.E. (2010) "Irregular Armed Forces, Shifting Patterns of Commitment, and Fragmented Sovereignty in the Developing World." *Theory and Society*, 39(3): 397–413.
- Davis, D.E. and Alvarado, A. (1999) "Liberalization, Public Insecurity, and Deteriorating Rule of Law in Mexico City." *Working Papers in Local Governance and Democracy*, 99(1): 95–107.
- Duhau, E. (1987) "La formación de una política social: el caso del Programa de Renovación Habitacional de la ciudad de México." *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos*, 2(1): 79.
- Eckstein, S. (1977) *The Poverty of Revolution*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fernandez, J. and Salazar, A.M. (2008) *The Enemy at Home: Drugs and Drug Dealing in Mexico*, Mexico City: Aguilar.
- Gamboa de Buen, J. and Revah, J. (1990) "Reconstrucción y política urbana en la ciudad de México." *Foro Internacional*, 30(4): 677–94.
- Gonzalez R., J. de J. (2012) "Extinción de dominio (escenarios internacionales, contexto en México y propuestas legislativas)." Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública Work document no. 128 (May): 23.
- Graham, S. (2010) *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*, London: Verso.
- Massolo, A. (1994) "Las políticas del barrio." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 56: 165–83.
- Medellín, J.A. (2007) "Concentran 3 delegaciones 48% del narcomenudeo." *El Universal* (March 13), online. Available at: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/83057.html>.
- Milenio (2010) "La guerra del narcomenudeo en el DF." *Milenio Semanal* (November 6).
- Milenio (2012) "Regresan los narcobloqueos a Monterrey." *Milenio* (February 24), online. Available at: <http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/e4c4329f7e0945ecf9acff4ac6ac6a59>.
- Molzahn, C., Ríos, V., and Shirk, D.A. (2012) "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011." Trans-Border Institute special report, San Diego, CA: UCSD.
- Mora, F. (2007) "Anuncia GDF expropiación en Tepito" *EsMas* (February 14), online. Available at: <http://www.esmas.com/noticierostelevisa/mexico/604237.html>.
- Moser, C.O.N. (2004) "Urban Violence and Insecurity: An Introductory Roadmap." *Environment & Urbanization*, 16(2): 3–16.
- Muggah, R. and Savage, K. (2012) "Urban Violence and Humanitarian Action: Engaging the Fragile City." *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, online. Available at: <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1524> [Accessed: 19 January 2012].
- Olmos, J.G. (2011) "The Bubble." *Proceso* (February 25), online. Available at: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=263782>.



- Pansters, W. and Castillo Berthier, H. (2007) "Violencia e inseguridad en la ciudad de México: entre la fragmentación y la politización." *Foro Internacional*, 47(3): 577–615.
- Proceso (2007) "Se descubre túnel en predio expropiado en Tepito." *Proceso* (February 24), online. Available at: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=205803>.
- Proceso (2010) "Narcomenudeo genera 13 MMDP en México: SSPF." *Proceso* (March 2), online. Available at: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=108133>.
- Quinones, S. (2001) *True Tales from Another Mexico*, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Ratcliffe, J. (2010) "Crime Mapping: Spatial and Temporal Challenges." in A.R. Piquero and D. Weisburd (eds) *Handbook of Quantitative Criminology*, New York: Springer Science Business Media.
- Renovación Habitacional Popular (1987) "Programa de Renovación Habitacional Popular en el DF." Progress report, Mexico City: Renovación Habitacional Popular.
- Rotker, S. (ed.) (2002) *Citizens of Fear: Urban Violence in Latin America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Terra (2007) "Exigen vecinos de Tepito detener expropiaciones" *Terra* (10 April).
- Tomas, F. (1994) "La ciudad y las estrategias socioespaciales." *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 56(4): 209–25.
- United Nations (2008) *The Threat of Narco-trafficking in the Americas*, New York: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Veloso, L. (2010) "Governing Heterogeneity in the Context of Compulsory Closeness: the 'Pacification' of Favelas in Rio de Janeiro." *Research in Urban Sociology*, 10: 253–57.

T&F Proofs, Not for Distribution